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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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SUBJECT: PRISONERS RIOT OVER DELAYED JUSTICE

11. On November 10, inmates at the Bo Prison rioted to protest lengthy remands, adjournment of cases, and subsequent prolonged detentions. Windows were broken and some prison property destroyed, and the rioters threatened to lynch prison officers; the Office of National Security's Provincial Security Coordinator was ultimately called in to address the situation when prison officials were unable to do so. The rioters were pacified by the Security Coordinator, who promised to investigate their claims, and the incident ended with no injuries or fatalities.

12. The Bo Prison currently holds 66 remand prisoners, many of whom have been remanded for years. The 35 trial prisoners experience numerous case adjournments, which extends even short trials by months or years. The prisoners noted that the magistrate, who handles low-level cases, frequently adjourns proceedings without explanation. They also stated that the State Counsel rarely attends High Court, which lengthens those trials as well. Though the Provincial Security Coordinator promised to raise these issues at the highest levels, he believes that improvements are unlikely, which could lead to further violence.

13. Comment: Adjournments and delays are noted problems within the Sierra Leone justice system, and is especially problematic in the provincial areas where there are few checks and balances on overburdened and inefficient court officers. The UK-funded Justice Sector Development Program is attempting to address these issues, but progress has been slow. Given the poor prison conditions, which include overcrowding and inadequate nutrition and medical care, this small riot could be the first of many as prisoners demand access to a system that seems ill-equipped to determine their guilt or innocence. End Comment.

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